

Jesus: Hero

PHBF 09.19.10

TEXT: Genesis 10:1-12:3

SCR. READING: Genesis 11:27-12:3

Words for kids:

SERIES: The Story of PHBF: Who We Are and What We're About

Hero story: Rocky, the Lord of the Rings

The Bible isn't a collection of nice little tales about heroic feats and noble characters. It's not like Aesop's Fables—a bunch of random stories each with a helpful little moral at the end. No, the Bible tells one unified Story—the Story of redemption. One plot: the gospel. One problem: sin. One solution: the resurrection. One hero: Jesus.

It's crucial for us to read the Bible this way, because all of us answer life's most important questions with some story or another. We gather our sense of who we are, where we are, and why we're here from a story.

Many of us have read the Bible as if it were merely a mosaic of little bits— theological bits, moral bits, historical-critical bits, sermon bits, devotional bits. But when we read the bible in such a fragmented way, we ignore its divine author's intention to shape our lives through its story. All human communities live out of some story that provides a context for understanding the meaning of history and gives shape and direction to their lives. If we allow the Bible to become fragmented, it is in danger of being absorbed into whatever *other* story is shaping our culture, and it will thus cease to shape our lives as it should. Idolatry has twisted the dominant cultural story of the secular Western world. If as believers we allow this story (rather than the Bible) to become the foundation of our thought and action, then our lives will manifest not the truths of Scripture, but the lies of an idolatrous culture. Hence, the unity of Scripture is no minor matter; a fragmented Bible may actually produce theologically orthodox, morally upright, warmly pious idol worshippers! (Craig Bartholomew & Michael Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, p 12)

### There appears to be no hope. (10:1-11:32)

The genealogies in the Bible serve an important purpose. Their purpose is often difficult to discern, but their context, language, and structure

show how they advance the narrative in which they occur. This particular genealogy makes an important theological point.

The world has been waiting for rescue through someone cryptically referred to as “the seed of the woman” in 3:15. The serpent Satan had led the human race into sin, but God said this individual would someday come and crush the serpent's head. From that point on, Genesis narrates a story of conflict between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman—the serpent's line that lives autonomously and the godly line that fears the Lord. Cain versus Abel, the first and last time the numbers are 50-50. From this point on, it's one man or at most, one family: Seth vs. the world (4:26), Noah and his family vs. the world (6:5-8). The situation is never too promising, but as long as there is one representative of the godly line, hope remains. The promised seed of the woman could still come through this one family, this one person.

A careful, first-time reader of the story would probably come to this point and think, “OK, there are some real promising signs here. It's not the Garden of Eden anymore, but the world has a fresh start under Noah. In Genesis 9:1 the Lord reiterates His first instructions to Adam: ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’ Chapter 10 shows that they are doing that. Maybe this fresh start is all the world needed to put the past behind and get on the right track.”

But beneath the surface, serious trouble is brewing. A careful reading shows that this genealogy isn't promising; rather, it sounds an ominous note in the story. 3 problems confront the reader:

- Judgment (10:1-11:9)

The first hint comes when we notice the emphasis on geographical spreading (cf. 10:5, 10-11, 18, 32). But it's not a amicable spreading; one of the individuals listed – Peleg, v 25 – is tagged with a name that means “division.” And each family list is summed up with a statement about their individual identity and possessions: their clans, languages, lands, and nations (vv 5 Japheth, 20 Ham, 31 Shem).

Why this emphasis on spreading and division and languages and lands? How did this happen? ANSWER: 11:1-9 (Babel).

Chronologically, the narrative of 11:1-9 actually precedes the Table of Nations, which appears in ch 10. It's the story of a unified humanity, Noah's 3 sons and their descendants living together with one language and culture, migrating en masse. Here's the question the reader should be asking: "Are these the seed of the woman or the seed of the serpent? ...autonomously or in the fear of the Lord? Their words give an instant, alarming answer:

**Genesis 11:4** *Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."*

Independence. Self-preservation. A determination to make a name, not for God, but for themselves. Their longing for status and dominion is an unabashed expression of mass rebellion, with all humanity attempting to storm heaven's gates.

The Lord, in response, confuses their language, forces them to separate from each other and scatter across the land, and thus frustrates their quest for a name. Thus, the Babel account interprets the genealogy of ch 10 for us by showing that these nations—just like Adam and Eve—have been banished and now are experiencing God's retribution, losing their quest for an enduring name.

In short, it's a world under judgment, living in exile.

- Idolatry (11:27-29)

The genealogy picks up again in 11:10, and begins to trace the family of Noah's son Shem, 10 generations down to Abram. The assumption is that we're following the thread of hope, the one son through whom will come of the seed of the woman. Maybe Peleg (v 18)? Maybe Reu (v 20)? Maybe Serug (v 22)? Maybe Nahor (v 24)? Maybe Terah (v 26)?

It doesn't look promising. The text hints through names and places that Terah's family worships idols. Ur was the center of lunar worship. Terah's name is related to the Hebrew word for moon, Sarai is named after the moon god's lover "Sharratu," and Milcah the moon god's daughter "Malkatu." Joshua 24:2 makes this explicit:

**Joshua 24:2** *And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.*

- Barrenness (11:30)

It's a godless family, but it's remotely possible that Abram is different. Perhaps he doesn't worship idols. Perhaps the seed of the woman might come through his wife.

The only problem is, he and Sarai are unable to conceive a child. The last flickering candle of hope for the human race has just been snuffed out...

### There appears a faint glimmer of hope. (12:1-3)

vv 2-3 Sixfold promise:

- 1) "great nation" = many descendants,
- 2) bless you,
- 3) great name,
- 4) be a blessing to others,
- 5) bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him,
- 6) blessing through them to all nations.

A couple other pieces get added in later reiterations of the covenant:

- 7) land (12:7; 13:14-17),
- 8) God as their God (17:7-8).

At first, this doesn't sound much like the answer that will fix the whole world. It sounds good for Abraham, but what about the curse of sin that has ruined the whole cosmos? This actually is God's first step toward an answer to sin's curse.

Since chapter 3, where God first pronounced judgment against sin, the word curse has reverberated through the story. Five times it appears:

- To the serpent: "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field..." (3:14) = defilement in the natural order
- To Adam: "cursed is the ground because of you" (3:17) = difficulty in fulfilling our calling

- To Cain: “now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand” (4:11) = corruption in human relationships
- Lamech: “...called his name Noah, saying, ‘Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.’” (5:29) = long waiting for resolution
- Noah: “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers” (9:25) = moral and spiritual degradation

But notice here, in God’s call to Abraham, the reverberating echo of the word “bless”:

- “I will bless you” v 2a
- “you will be a blessing” v 2b
- “I will bless those who bless you” v 3a
- “all families of the earth shall be blessed” v 3b

This five-fold parallel of “bless” with “curse” indicates that, through Abraham, God intends to restore the whole world. He is going to reverse the effects – the curse – of sin in the world, and it’s going to happen through Abraham. This is God’s answer to the problem of sin that entered God’s perfect paradise so long ago.

Notice, embedded in the promise of blessing, is this quiet little statement: “I will make your name great.” Abraham descends from Noah in the line of Shem (11:10). It’s a quiet irony, because Shem literally means “name.” The builders of Babel set out to make a name for themselves, and God stops them, mockingly shifting the focus to this man whose title is literally the word “Name.”

And now, in God’s covenant with Abraham, we see again the promise of a great name. Unlike the builders of Babel, who sought to preserve their name through a great building, Abraham’s name will become great by the work of God, who is going to build his family into a great nation.

Why? So that through Abraham, blessing would come to all people.

Abraham’s family Israel thus has a missiological purpose from the outset. They exist to benefit the rest of humanity by returning the world to its pre-Fall, Edenic state.

Hope dawns, but at this point the light is still quite dim. Abraham’s brother is dead, wife is barren, he is a stranger living in a foreign country... “As far as the ancient world is concerned, he is a ‘no-name’...” (Dempster, 75). God’s saving plan is off to an inauspicious start.

### **There dawns a glorious sunrise of hope. (Lk 1:68-79; Acts 3:25-26; Gal 3:6-9, 13-16)**

From Genesis 12, God’s rescue plan through the seed of the woman continues and becomes more and more specific. In Genesis 26:4, we learn that the promise passes from Abraham to his son Isaac, more specifically, thru his grandson Jacob (Gen 28:14), ...more specifically, thru his great-grandson Judah (Gen 49:10), and then to a son of the tribe of Judah named David (2 Sam 7:16).

Hundreds of years pass. Hope ebbs and flows. God’s promise to Abraham looked like the dawn of hope’s new day, but that sun has been slow to rise. Until one day, 2,000 years after Abraham, a word from God comes again.

**Luke 1:68-79** <sup>68</sup> *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people <sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, <sup>70</sup> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, <sup>71</sup> that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; <sup>72</sup> to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us <sup>74</sup> that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, <sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. <sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, <sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, <sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high <sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

What's the sunrise? Where is this fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham?

Peter explains it in his sermon shortly after Pentecost:

**Acts 3:25-26** <sup>25</sup> *You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'* <sup>26</sup> *God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.*"

The common understanding of this covenant in Peter's day (and often still in our own) was that it focused on the collective group of the physical descendants of Abraham—that they would be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

But Peter suggests a different understanding. When he reads the Abrahamic Covenant, he sees it coming to fulfillment in the specific person of Jesus, not in the collective group of Jews. God promised blessing to all nations through Abraham, and in Acts 3:26 Peter shows how that blessing comes: "God is now sending His servant to you to *bless you*, to fulfill God's promise through Abraham to you, by turning every one of you from your wickedness." In other words, the covenant blessing comes, not through all of the Jews collectively, but through this man Jesus specifically.

This is the way the apostles understood the Abrahamic Covenant.

Notice how Paul understands it in Galatians 3:16:

**Galatians 3:16** *Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.*

The blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant comes through Jesus, the offspring of Abraham. He is the hero, the answer to our need, the hope for all the world to be redeemed, and the GREAT NAME promised to Abraham:

**Philippians 2:5-11** <sup>5</sup> *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* <sup>6</sup> *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* <sup>7</sup> *but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being*

*found in human form,* <sup>8</sup> *he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* <sup>9</sup> *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,* <sup>10</sup> *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* <sup>11</sup> *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

This is why we are a Christ-centered church. We exist to make Jesus' name great. He is the hero, He is the answer, His is the great name that heals and gives hope and restores God's blessing to the world.

Implications for our church:

- We evaluate all aspects of our church by how well they reveal and reflect Jesus' character and worth.
- Every sermon we preach endeavors to portray the glory of Jesus Christ. He is our answer!

**Acts 4:12** *There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

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